



Otitis media

Ear Infections

SURPRISING FACTS:

As many as 80% of ear infections will clear up on their own. Resistance to antibiotics occurs most often in children who take antibiotics for ear infections.

WHAT TO DO:

- Press a warm wash cloth or heating pad set on low against the sore ear.
- Rest and let your body fight the infection.
- Drink more water.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve pain. Read the label for a child's dose.
- Decongestants may help. Avoid antihistamines.

CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:

- You have an earache that lasts longer than 12 hours, or if the pain is severe.
- You suspect an ear infection in an infant or young child.
- Your infant or toddler rubs or pulls on an ear and appears to be in pain.
- Your child also has a fever.

Ear infections usually involve a build up of fluid in the middle ear. Most ear infections start after a cold. Your body fights the cold virus. The tube between the ear and the throat may swell and close up. Then fluid builds up in the ear. Pressure also builds up and causes pain. The fluid in the ear can last for several weeks.

There are different kinds of ear infections. Cold viruses are the most common cause of ear infections. Allergies and second-hand smoke can also lead to infections. Bacteria can grow in the fluid trapped in the ear. Bacterial infections can cause pain, fever, dizziness and ringing in the ears. In some cases the pressure can damage the eardrum. Your health care provider may treat this kind of infection with an antibiotic. Antibiotics are used to kill bacteria.

Young children get more ear infections because they get more colds. Also, the tube between the ear and throat is smaller and more easily blocked. Many children have fluid in the middle ear for as long as two months after a cold. They do not always need antibiotics.

Most ear infections will clear up on their own. Talk with your health care provider about whether you need an antibiotic. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed may harm you by creating stronger germs. Antibiotics don't kill viruses, so they won't make a cold go away any faster. It is best to take antibiotics only when needed. If your provider gives you antibiotics, always finish the entire prescription—the last few pills kill the toughest germs.

The best way to prevent infections is to wash your hands. Viruses are spread when you touch your hands to your mouth, nose and eyes. Washing your hands often with soap and warm water will help keep viruses from entering your body. Breastfeed infants in an upright position and never put them to bed with a bottle, because the liquid can get into the ear. When blowing your nose, blow gently. Avoid tobacco smoke or stop smoking.



Washington State Department of

Health

DOH Pub 130-028 11/2002

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Developed in collaboration with:
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department / Illustration © 2001
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Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and Healthwise



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